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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000519

SIPDIS

FOR REFUGEE OFFICERS; CAIRO FOR POL -- MAXSTADT.

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IV](#) [LI](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: UNHCR SEEKS USG HELP WITH NIGERIA ON
LIBERIAN REFUGEES

REF: A. SECSTATE 36393

[B](#). LAGOS 00381

[C](#). LAGOS 00407

[D](#). ACCRA 00363

[E](#). SECSTATE 08699

Classified By: CG ROBYN HINSON-JONES FOR REASONS 1.5 (B&D).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY. Eusebe Hounsokou, UNHCR representative in Nigeria, updated Poloff on his efforts to relocate 5,000 Liberian refugees from Cote d'Ivoire to Nigeria (Ref B). Per UNHCR Geneva's information, Hounsokou advised the GON that, since the USG may take up to 10,000 Liberian refugees for resettlement, permanent shelters will not/not be necessary to accommodate those transferred here until arrangements can be made to move them to the United States. If the GON approves the relocation, UNHCR will advise against placing all 5,000 Liberian refugees in a single camp within Nigeria. He asked that Ambassador Jeter raise the issue with President Obasanjo. Per Abuja Septel, GON appears to be leaning toward accepting some refugees. Ambassador's intervention with the President may not be necessary. Apparently receiving inaccurate information from Geneva, Hounsokou is representing our offer regarding possible United States resettlement of refugees as more ironclad than we would like. Washington/Geneva may want to clarify this with UNHCR (see para 5). END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (C) On February 26, Hounsokou recounted to Poloff his earlier conversations with MFA Permanent Secretary Ambassador Daniel Hart and GON Commissioner for Refugees Professor Igna Gabriel. Hounsokou's initial approach to the MFA was not forwarded to Nigeria's refugee commissioner, who asked that a formal request be readdressed to him. Hounsokou sent the requested letter to Commissioner Gabriel on February 25 and was awaiting the GON's official reply. On separate occasions, each gentleman gave Hounsokou his personal support for relocating the requested 5,000 Liberian refugees to Nigeria from Cote d'Ivoire (Ref A). Each told Hounsokou he felt "ashamed" that Nigeria had not taken part in the military operation, and thus hoped the GON would play a humanitarian role.

[3](#). (C) Hounsokou is optimistic that GON will accept the refugees for relocation here. Gabriel suggested to Hounsokou that Obasanjo will make the decision personally. Gabriel will tell Obasanjo his opinion that "This is our duty. We should assist with the refugees." Hounsokou asked if Ambassador Jeter could speak with President Obasanjo to confirm USG interest in the issue and to encourage a rapid decision on the GON's part. (Embassy Abuja delivered the Reftel A demarche to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Nigerians seemed to be leaning heavily toward a positive decision. Consequently, there is little utility for the Ambassador's intervention at this stage. The MFA and other GON agencies are scheduled to meet within the next week and make a decision on the refugees. Depending on the decision, the Mission will reconsider the appropriateness of Ambassador Jeter intervening with the President.)

[4](#). (C) NOTE: UNHCR Geneva apparently advised Hounsokou that USG may take up to 10,000 Liberian refugees for resettlement. On this basis, he is suggesting to the GON that permanent shelters will not/not be necessary to accommodate those transferred here until arrangements can be made to move them to the U.S. Poloff cautioned Hounsokou that the USG would first require each individual case to be dutifully documented, something we understand has been difficult given the problems with file corruption at Nicla (Refs A and D). Hounsokou requested more information about what USG requirements will entail in this regard.

[5](#). (U) Washington/Geneva: Based on information received from UNHCR Geneva, Hounsokou apparently has represented to the GON

that the USG was firmly committed to taking thousands of refugees. Our interpretation of Reftel A indicates that this is not the case. To avoid future misunderstanding, Washington/Geneva may want to clarify our position with UNHCR Geneva.

16. (C) Hounsokou expressed concern that the GON may lack the resources to transport the refugees. Any assistance the USG can provide in this regard would be appreciated. Poloff suggested that Hounsokou check with UNHCR Geneva for possible transportation funds, and mentioned that the USG recently contributed \$30 million to the UNHCR that was allocated to Africa (Ref E).

17. (C) If the GON approves the relocation, UNHCR will advise against placing all 5,000 Liberian refugees in a single camp within Nigeria. Experience has taught UNHCR that large refugee camps often become recruitment grounds for armed factions to recruit fighters.

18. (SBU) UNHCR plans to relocate its main office to Abuja sometime between September and December 2003, when their contractor should have completed the new facility. Due to the Lagos office's proximity to the refugee camp, Hounsokou would like to keep a senior staff member here to manage the camp.

19. (C) COMMENT: The GON has provided hopeful signs that it will accept a number of refugees. Whatever it decides, the GON will base its decision on its role as a sub-regional leader balanced against strong domestic budgetary and political exigencies. Potential USG plans to resettle Liberians in the U.S. may be a factor in the decision but a secondary one. However, unless corrected, the misunderstanding that the US will take in most of not all these refugees will be important in shaping UNHCR and Nigeria's plans for accommodating the refugees. The UNHCR and the GON would need significantly fewer resources to accommodate refugees on a short-term basis. Consequently, it is imperative that we eliminate any misunderstanding about the USG's commitment toward the Liberian refugees. END COMMENT.
HINSON-JONES